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ABSTRACT

First-year students taking developmental courses need the kind of guidance a freshman seminar can provide when the advice is directly relevant to their progress. An alternative to assigning a heterogeneous group of students to an academic advisor is to offer a course which enriches the key elements of a freshman seminar while applying the standard components of a developmental course in college reading and writing to its content. The advantage of this integrated approach is that students get help at the right level from a professor who knows them and their abilities. To plan an effective syllabus, instructors must consider both the students' and the administration's goals. It has been found valuable to build the course around 10 themes culled from 10 issues that students have cited and that they considered crucial to their adjustment to college: (1) roommates whose values differ; (2) relationships with parents; (3) weight; (4) grades, study habits, and time management; (5) drugs and alcohol; (6) coaches and sports performance; (7) career goals; (8) boyfriends and girlfriends; (9) minority issues; and (10) attitudes about students with disabilities. Integrating these concerns with administrative goals produces eight key elements to address in the course: career exploration, getting along with others, communicating with professors, individual conferencing, studying for exams, schooling versus education, equitable opportunity, and self-evaluation of the freshman experience. A sample syllabus demonstrates topics and activities which can be addressed in one semester, and prior research supports the implementation of such an integrated course. (One appendix--a grid which summarizes the contents of 3 texts which include important topics for a freshman seminar--and 15 references are attached.) (PRA)

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Integrating the Freshman Seminar

with a

Developmental Reading-Writing Course

NEW YORK COLLEGE LEARNING SKILLS ASSOCIATION

Fourteenth Annual Symposium

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Ithaca, NY 14850

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I. Introduction

First-year students taking developmental courses need the kind of guidance a Freshman Seminar (Gardner and Jewler 1989) provides at the times **when** the **advice** is directly relevant to their progress. An alternative to assigning a heterogeneous group of students to an academic adviser can be planned and implemented for this purpose in a developmental reading-writing course.

The integrated approach suggested is not a substitute for freshman orientation. The instructor of an integrated course need not be the students' academic adviser, and the approach is not intended to fulfill all of the goals of a Freshman Seminar.

Instead, a course like this can enrich eight key elements of a Freshman Seminar because **more academic work and more thorough investigation and consideration of the issues are required.** The

standard components of a developmental course in college reading and writing -- reading, writing, speaking, study skills, grammar, and vocabulary -- are included and applied to the content.

Brief mention of how this idea evolved may be useful to other college faculty and administrators.

II. Why It's a Good Idea

As opposed to a free-standing, heterogeneous one-credit Freshman Seminar, there are several advantages to an integrated approach.

A. Students get help (advising) at the right level;

B. Students get help from a professor who knows them and their individual verbal abilities;

C. Students get help with what matters to them when they need it;

D. More thorough investigation, consideration, and understanding of the issues are possible (and required) of the students;

E. The professor can follow through with fuller commentary, advice, and extended/reinforcing assignments.

F. The opposing arguments such as time (money) and scheduling challenges will always be with us, BUT

1. Look at your college's retention rate and admissions prospectus (in terms of graduation rate and identifiable causes of student success), and you should be able to find compelling reasons why your administration should support an integrated approach;

2. Acknowledge that you can't do everything, and be selective.

We come from a variety of kinds of institutions, and each of us must consider both the student and administrative audiences, as well as our own knowledge of what's most appropriate. So, how does one make sense out of this "chaos?"

III. What Does One's Administration Want?

If goals have already been set for what one's institution's Freshman Seminar should include, and they often have been, of course one has to keep them in mind. I do, but I plan a syllabus in terms of:

A. The students' needs;

B. What I can possibly do;

C. How all three match.

For example, at my institution the administrative goals for College-101 are:

1. To improve students' success and satisfaction as students. To improve their understanding of what college is all about.

2. To help students assess and formulate their own educational goals.

3. To help students to understand important features of Ithaca College as an academic community, including:
-the importance of academic honesty
-the range of extracurricular and curricular opportunities
-students' responsibilities as members of this community
-the resources available to students.

4. To help students to understand the purposes of a liberal arts education and the curriculum at Ithaca College, including the relationship between a liberal arts education and career

opportunities.

5. To help students to improve study skills, including time management.

6. To give students more contact with their advisers" (Academic Advising, 12/89 Newsletter).

Goals like this seem flexible and reasonable, and there are several things one can do to use them to meet students' needs in terms of what a professor can possibly do.

IV. What Do the Students Want?

Students who have made it successfully through the "first-time, once-in-a-lifetime" experience of being a successful freshman are more than willing to respond, read, express themselves in writing, and give advice to future new freshmen -- as well as professors, advisers, and administrators.

When I first piloted an integrated approach to the Freshman Seminar in a developmental reading-writing course three years ago, 30 students, most of whom had been with me for a full year, gave some real, really enlightening advice. From their culminating essays on "The Freshman Experience: What I Learned" (Vesterman 1988 and 1989 OR Goshgarian 1990), I culled 10 distinctive THEMES about issues they considered crucial to their well-being and adjustment to college. Those cited most often include dealing with:

1. Roommates Whose Values Differ
2. Relationships With Parents
3. Weight
4. Grades, Study Habits, and Time Management
5. Drugs and Alcohol
6. Coaches and Sports Performance

7. Career Goals
8. Boyfriends and Girlfriends
9. Being a Minority Student or International Student -- and Other Students' Ignorance About Same
10. Understanding One's Self in Relation to Students With Disabilities.

Most of these students are now completing their Junior Year in college, and many of them still make a point of taking the time to talk to me about their career goals, personal values, and what liberal arts courses they might pursue to enrich their educations.

V. What Can I Possibly Do?

Another question to which college faculty who have teaching expertise and who exercise their right to academic freedom of inquiry should respond is: What Do I Want To Do? Given the two audiences above, and having piloted an integrated approach myself, there are eight key elements of a Freshman Seminar which I want to integrate with a developmental course. They include:

1. Career Exploration
2. Getting Along With Others
3. Communicating With Professors
4. Individual Conferencing
5. Studying for Exams
6. Schooling versus Education
7. Equitable Opportunity
8. Self-Evaluation of the Freshman Experience.

These goals are congruent with empirical research in the area of college (students') learning and study strategies, goals generally espoused by experienced college faculty, and the particular audiences at my own institution. (Note the research categories under that heading and the Appendix which summarizes topics generally regarded by college faculty as being of value to

students).

VI. Suggested Topics for Activities and Lesson Plans

Given time and budget constraints, what are some suggested topics for activities and lesson plans which can be incorporated into a developmental reading-writing course in one semester?

September

Introduce each other
Freewrite "My Goals for X College" (save these!)
Birth Order (Kennedy and Smith (1986) OR
"What I Worry About" (Zaritsky 1988)
Computer Orientation - Write a letter to someone you care about
Writing papers in college and introduction to the Liberal Arts

October

Time Management
Career Exploration, Global (Behrens and Rosen 1987; Friday 1988)
Reassess Time Management
Study Skills for Reading different kinds of materials for courses with different demands (Flippo and Caverly 1991)
Library Treasure Hunt, Career Planning (Occupational Outlook Handbook most recent edition)
Begin Decoding Professors

November

Decoding Professors (Friday 1988) "Interview a Professor You Admire"
Guided reading of the college catalog and other materials needed to prepare for academic advising
Individual appoints with professors/advisers
"What Offices on Campus Offer" - Interviews conducted in pairs, by appointment
Recapitulation of Liberal Arts
Personal Values as a lead-in to Final Exams and Assertiveness

December

Values, Assertiveness
Studying for Exams, Practice in Class
Substance Abuse

Self-Evaluation of the Freshman Experience so far (give back what the students wrote about their goals at the beginning of the term!).

VII What the Research Shows

Teaching reading and study strategies to college students is necessary; although there is a need for further research, there is a recognized body of empirical evidence (Flippo and Caverly 1991) which can enhance teaching in seven areas directly related to students' success in college:

A. Vocabulary Development (see also Meyer, 1990)

B. Teacher-Directed Comprehension Strategies

C. Textbook Study Strategies

D. Value of Notetaking During Lectures

E. External Factors That Influence Study

F. Internal Factors That Influence Study

G. Preparing For and Taking Tests.

What is not and should not be surprising is that students' ability to read college level material is a very important variable in relation to the difficulty of texts and tasks, and the criteria for an acceptable level of performance.

Therefore, integrating the Freshman Seminar with a developmental reading-writing course is more likely to be a successful approach for all the people involved than is the currently typical one-credit, freestanding Freshman Seminar.

VIII. Where Do We Go From Here?

This is a challenging time to be teaching at the college level. As is reported, not only in scholarly works, but also in mass media (Henry 1991) controversies about political correctness and freedom of speech, multicultural curricula and canons, and tight budgets abound.

We can't be or rest assured that one term of an integrated Freshman Seminar/developmental reading-writing course will "do it" for the students who need the instruction most. It takes a year of the same people working together to accomplish the real goals of the Freshman Seminar.

The second term of an integrated approach should include more experiences for the students in dealing with:

A. Personal Relationships, "Friendship Paper" (Meyer 1987);

B. Diversity Awareness and Equitable Opportunity; a paper about college sports is a good way to open students' minds;

C. Schooling versus Education, especially in relation to the value of the Liberal Arts and Coming of Age;

D. More language training, particularly in listening; I would use The American Reader: Voices That Moved A Nation (Ravitch 1990).

To aid others in the planning of an integrated approach of their own, the Appendix of this paper is a grid which summarizes the contents of three commercial texts, each of which includes most of the topics generally espoused to be valuable to students in a Freshman Seminar by college faculty experienced in teaching the course.

Appendix

Gardner & Jewler (1989)	Rathus & Fichner-Rathus (1991)	Friday (1988)
	Making the Transition	
1, 2	1	1
	Higher Education	
3		3
	Study Skills and Time Management	
4	3, 4	5
	Decoding Your Professors	
5		6
	Working With Your Adviser	
6		4
	Using Campus Resources/Library	
7	2	2, 11
	Writing Papers	
8	6	10
	Liberal Arts and Critical Thinking	
9, 10		7, 8
	Choosing a Major/Career Planning	
11	14	9
	Developing Personal Values	
13		12
	Relationships/Resolving Social Conflicts	
12, 14	9, 10	13, 16
	Campus Leadership	
15		14
	Living With Others	
16	12	15
	Physical Health and Fitness	
17	11	18
	Drugs and Alcohol	
18	13	17
	Stress Management	
19	8	19
	Assertiveness	
20		20
	Money Management	
21	4	21
	Return To College Students	
22		22

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